

Rest Home Told To Cool Off

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NATIONAL PARK - With temperatures soaring above 90 degrees this past week, a local boarding home has come under state scrutiny for failing to keep its temperatures down.

State officials from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) came to the Shady Oaks Rest Home Wednesday after receiving numerous complaints that the facility was allowing indoor temperatures to rise well past the recommended 82 degrees.

"We took temperatures throughout the facility and they range from 86 degrees in the one room that has an air conditioner to as high as 91 degrees," said Bill Connelly, director of the DCA's Division of Codes and Standards. "That obviously doesn't meet the requirements of the code."

Connelly referred to a boarding house code that requires state-licensed facilities like Shady Oaks, which has room for 22 residents, to maintain a temperature of 82 degrees or lower. After a state field agent discovered the code violation, the facility's owner was instructed to either purchase and immediately install enough air conditioners to lower the temperatures or move the residents to an air-conditioned hotel.

"The owner should have been doing something about this before we arrived," Connelly said. "They didn't before, but they are now. There's no requirement that the entire home be maintained below 82, but they have to have enough areas so that residents can be in those areas and be cool. If all else fails, the owner is obligated to move them to somewhere else where it is cool."

Shady Oaks had one air conditioning unit in a dining area, but Connelly said it did not provide a sufficiently cooled area.

Residents living near Shady Oaks had contacted borough Administrator Robert Dougherty Jr. with concerns that the facility wasn't being properly cooled. Dougherty said he and other officials became frustrated, because the borough lacks the jurisdiction to force Shady Oaks staff to comply with the temperature standards.

"We've had residents that are concerned and neighbors that are concerned about the conditions for the people who live there," Dougherty said. "These people's rights are being trampled here, and we couldn't do anything about it."

Local police conducted well-being checks on residents, but that is the only action local authorities could take. Police Chief Lin Couch said officers had conducted numerous checks, and the coolest room in the facility was 86 degrees.

Dougherty said he was happy, though, now that the DCA has taken steps to rectify the situation.

"People shouldn't have to live in that type of setting," Dougherty said.